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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a model of microcounseling training for increasing the ability of the reading instructor to be a facilitative interviewer when working with students. The microcounseling training model is based on five essential propositions: that it is possible to lessen the complexity of the counseling or interviewing process through focusing on single skills; that the microcounseling training model provides important opportunities for self-observation and confrontation; that interviewers can learn from observing video models demonstrating the skills they are attempting to develop; that model training can be used to teach interviewing skills from a diverse and practical perspective; and that microcounseling training sessions are real interviewing sessions. The twelve basic microcounseling skills around which the reading instructor or trainee would focus his initial training in interviewing are: attending behavior, open invitation to talk, minimal encouragement to talk, reflection of feeling, paraphrasing, summarization of feeling, summarization of content, learning client's attitudes toward tests, expression of feeling, sharing behavior, direct mutual communication, and interpretation. (WR)

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THE MICROCOUNSELING TRAINING MODEL: INTERVIEWING SKILLS FOR THE READING INSTRUCTOR

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Instruction in basic interviewing skills is taking place in a variety of educational institutions with students preparing for a number of different professions (Ivey, 1971, p.4). People interested in psychological and educational counseling, teaching, medicine, nursing, psychiatry, clinical psychology, the ministry and sub-professional helping roles are increasingly experiencing the need to systematically study their interview behavior. Despite the diversity of expertise represented in the professions mentioned above, all interviewers need to learn to listen, to ask questions, to attend to feelings, to interpret statements, etc. (Ivey, 1971, p.6).

The microcounseling training model is an attempt to develop a systematic approach to teaching interviewing skills. The purpose of this paper is to propose the model as an approach to increasing the ability of the reading instructor to be a facilitative interviewer when working with students.

The Microcounseling Training Model

The microcounseling training model is based on five essential propositions (Ivey, 1971, p.8). The first principle is that it is possible to lessen the complexity of the counseling or interviewing process through focusing on single skills. The goal of the person experiencing the training is to master one skill at a time rather than to demonstrate competence in several skills simultaneously.

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Second, the microcounseling training model provides important opportunities for self-observation and confrontation. Immediately after conducting an interview (taped by audio or video means), the trainee and his supervisor have the opportunity to playback the session. Thus, opportunity for instantaneous feedback serves as a learning experience to improve future interview performance.

Third, interviewers can learn from observing video models demonstrating the skills they are attempting to develop. Since specific interviewing skills are demonstrated on videotaped excerpts, the trainee can hear and see good technique in action.

Fourth, the microcounseling training method can be used to teach interviewing skills from a diverse and practical perspective. Basic skills of attending behavior, acceptance and paraphrasing as well as advanced Gestalt, Transactional Analysis or Behavioral techniques can be taught.

Fifth, microcounseling training sessions are real interviewing sessions. Even though role-playing and simulation are sometimes used in connection with this model, the interviewer often finds himself assuming a real interviewing or counseling role. Often the volunteer student or client finds himself discussing actual concerns or problems.

While many variations are possible, most research and methodology in microcounseling has been conducted by putting the trainee through the following progressive steps (Ivey, 1971) based on the propositions mentioned above:

1. The trainee receives instructions to enter a room where he will interview a client. Depending on the situation, the topic may or may not be defined. Similar instructions are given to the volunteer client, with the exception that he is told he is about to be interviewed.
2. A five-minute diagnostic session (with the trainee interviewing the client) is then videotaped.

3. The client leaves the room and completes an evaluation form or may be interviewed by a second supervisor. These data are then available for the supervisory session with the trainee.
4. The trainee reads a written manual describing the specific skill to be learned in this session. The supervisor talks with him about the session and about the manual.
5. Video models of an expert demonstrating the specific skill are shown. There may be a positive and a negative model of the skill.
6. The trainee is shown his initial interview and discusses this with his supervisor. He is asked to identify examples where he engaged in or failed to apply the specific skill in question.
7. The supervisor and trainee review the skill together and plan for the next counseling session.
8. The trainee re-interviews the same client for five minutes.
9. Feedback and evaluation on the final session are made available to the trainee.

Starting with the most basic of interviewing skills and progressing to the more complex, reading instructors could be helped to increase the level of facilitativeness they offer during individual conferences with students. Since more and more reading improvement programs, learning skills centers, etc., are designing skills development programs on an individual basis for students, it is becoming increasingly important for reading instructors to conduct individual conferences effectively. What are the interviewing skills that can be taught within the microcounseling training model?

The Microcounseling Skills

The twelve basic microcounseling skills (Ivey, 1971) around which the reading instructor or other trainee would focus his <u>initial</u> training in interviewing are:

1. Attending Behavior
2. Open Invitation to Talk
3. Minimal Encourages to Talk
4. Reflection of Feeling
5. Paraphrasing

6. Summarization of Feeling
7. Summarization of Content
8. Learning Client's Attitudes Toward Tests: A Specialized Skill
9. Expression of Feeling
10. Sharing Behavior
11. Direct Mutual Communication
12. Interpretation

As previously discussed, each skill taught and practiced within the microcounseling training model is described in a manual and demonstrated on videotape for the trainee. To illustrate, here is an excerpt from the Interviewing Skills Manual (Ivey, 1971) describing "attending behavior":

> Good attending behavior demonstrates to the client that you respect him as a person and that you are interested in what he has to say. By utilizing attending behavior to enhance the client's self-respect and to establish a secure atmosphere, the interviewer facilitates free expression of whatever is on the client's mind.
>
> The following are the three primary types of activities which best characterize good attending behavior:
>
> 1. The interviewer should be physically relaxed and seated with natural posture. If the interviewer is comfortable, he is better able to listen to the person with whom he is talking. Also, if the interviewer is relaxed physically, his posture and movements will be natural, thus enhancing his own sense of well-being. This sense of comfortableness better enables the interviewer to attend to and communicate with the client.
> 2. The interviewer should initiate and maintain eye contact with the interviewee. However, eye contact can be overdone. Varied use of eye contact is most effective, as staring fixedly or with undue intensity usually makes the client uneasy. If you are going to listen to someone, look at him.
> 3. The final characteristic of good attending behavior is the interviewer's use of comments which follow directly from what the interviewee is saying. By directing one's comments and questions to the topics provided by the client, one not only helps him develop an area of discussion, but reinforces the client's free expression, resulting in more spontaneity and animation in the client's talking.

Since each interviewing skill is described as illustrated and demonstrated on video tape, it is easy for the reading instructor or other professional to compare tapes of his own interviewing to models. The

microcounseling training model is conducive to self-evaluation and critiquing which encourages involvement and motivation to develop a facilitative interviewing style.

In addition to practicing the twelve skills that have been proposed in conjunction with the microcounseling training model, other skills can be developed utilizing the same training concept. For example, goal setting, information giving, progress assessing and reassurance (Capuzzi, Klausner, Osen, 1974) are all aspects of interview behavior that the reading instructor might use in the process of working with a student in a reading center or learning skills program.

Implications for the Reading Instructor

Research focusing on the microcounseling training model is providing data of interest to those wishing to improve interviewing skills. In general, beginning interviewers do not possess a stable repertoire of behaviors or techniques and their responses are often determined by the person they happen to be interviewing. As noted by Ivey (1971) beginning interviewers spend too much time talking, interrupt the person they are talking to, ask closed-ended questions, make long, awkward speeches and lapse into uneasy, unplanned silences. Of potential interest to the reading instructor is that these interview behaviors can be improved as a result of training. In a study by Moreland, Phillips, Ivey and Lockhart (1970), it was found that most of these errors can be eliminated with training utilizing the microcounseling concept. Similarly, Kelley (1970), using a modified microcounseling format, found that two trained groups when compared to a control group had done the following: (a) significantly reduced the number of and length of utterances, (b) lowered their percentage of talk time, and (c) reduced the number of interruptions. Hutchcraft (1970), teaching interviewing

skills, found that the microcounseling training model changed four variables: (a) frequency of counselor interruptions, (b) frequency of counselor zero response latency, (c) total number of counselor responses, and (d) total duration of counselor talk time.

The real test, however, of interviewing behavior is the impact it has on the people being interviewed. In studies (Ivey, Normington, Miller, Morrill, and Haase, 1969; Higgins, Ivey, and Uhlemann, 1970) in which clients have been asked to rate the interviewer, it has been found that interviewers have been rated more favorably after training via the microcounseling model than before. With the current emphasis on individual prescription of learning programs necessitating frequent one-to-one conferences between instructor and student, instructor ability to interview well becomes increasingly important. The microcounseling training model and, for that matter, any other approach that will help instructors become more facilitative and better able to develop rapport with students should perhaps be utilized in teacher education and in-service programs. The reading instructor can become a "communications specialist" in every sense of the term.

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